DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 348 692 CS 213 498

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TITLE Democratizing English as an International Language.
PUB DATE Apr 92
NOTE 23p.; Paper presented at the Conference on World Englishes Today (Urbana, IL, April 2-4, 1992).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS English (Second Language); *International Relations; Language Attitudes; *Language Role; Political Issues; *Political Power; *Politics of Education
IDENTIFIERS Cultural Hegemony; Educational Issues; *English as an International Language

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is threefold. The first section shows how the political uses of language engendered by both western-style liberalism on the one hand and various forms of nationalism on the other lead to the negation of democratic ideals. Because of the current international situation, political aspects of language are receiving more and more attention. Second and Third World countries regularly accuse the United States and other First World countries of linguistic imperialism. In the former, national languages have become a weapon against the external imposition of a "new world order." The second section focuses on intellectuals and education and their role in the reproduction of these systems. Language specialists and teachers typically function as instruments of dominant ideologies; their nearly exclusive focus on linguistic and developmental issues tends to obscure the broader socio-political context underlying their theories. The third section suggests ways in which English as an International Language (EIL) could function as a democratic language through the development of a transglossic function for English and through the democratization of education. Only as learners participate in the educational process, and following Gramsci are elevated to the status of intellectuals capable of making their own decisions, will a democratic model of EIL be aimed at. (Contains 27 references.) (Author/SR)

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Democratizing English as an International Language.

Marc Deneire.*

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ABSTRACT: The aim of this paper is threefold. The first section shows how the political uses of language engendered by both western-style liberalism on the one hand and various forms of nationalism on the other lead to the negation of democratic ideals. Because of the current international situation, political aspects of language are receiving more and more attention. Second and Third World countries regularly accuse the United States and other First World countries of linguistic imperialism. In the former, national languages have become a weapon against the external imposition of a "new world order." The second section focuses on intellectuals and education and their role in the reproduction of these systems. Language specialists and teachers typically function as instruments of dominant ideologies; their nearly exclusive focus on linguistic and developmental issues tends to obscure the broader socio-political context underlying their theories. The third section suggests ways in which EIL could function as a democratic language through the development of a transglossic function for English and through the democratization of education. Only as learners participate in the educational process, and, following Gramsci, are elevated to the status of intellectuals capable of making their own decisions, will we arrive at a democratic model of EIL.

Introduction.

The most astonishing aspect of English in the modern world is that it has managed to mystify the whole political, business, and academic communities alike. English has become the accepted language of wider communication in almost every single field and most of us

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cannot even imagine how another language could be used instead. Oftentimes, it is seen as the "language of opportunity," an ideal tool for democracy that opens the door to the wonderful domains of education, science, and business. This "illusion of linguistic communism" (Bourdieu, 1991: 43) was already widely spread among eighteenth century thinkers, and was further reinforced in our era by the development of modern linguistic theory as a full-fledged science. For Auguste Comte: "Language forms a kind of wealth, which all can make use of at once without causing any diminution of the store, and which thus admits a complete community of enjoyment; for all, freely participating in the general treasure, unconsciously and in its preservation" (cited in Bourdieu, 1991: 42). By limiting the concepts of *langue* and *linguistic competence* to a simple intellectual and technical capacity, twentieth century linguists similarly ignore the differential conditions of access to language. It is only recently that language specialists have become interested in the ideological nature of language, i.e., in its use for legitimating the power of a dominant speech community or an elite, both nationally and internationally (Kachru, 1986; Tollefson, 1991; Phillipson, 1992).

The present difficulties of all capitalist economies and the resurgence of nationalism in many parts of the world have brought to light the social and political values associated with English and other languages; English is increasingly seen as a vehicle for the expression of western domination while national languages are usually associated with notions of national identity and resistance to British and American imperialism.

The aim of this paper is (1) to show how both western-style liberalism and nationalism lead to the negation of democratic ideals; (2) to explain how intellectuals and education participate in the reproduction of these systems; and (3) to suggest ways in which English and language teaching can contribute to the construction of a true democratic society.

Liberalism, Nationalism, and English.

In seeking a point of departure in the discussion of democracy, one naturally turns to the French eighteenth century, the philosophical cradle of most western societies.

Against the stagnant, oppressive agrarian societies of the *ancien régime*, dominated by sword and superstition, the French Philosophers promoted the idea of a Universal Man, based on the laws of nature. Human nature is everywhere the same and since our rational capacity is equally universal, Reason should be the basis for justice and law. Once all people have adopted the same natural and universal laws, different peoples will intensify commercial and spiritual exchanges, using the most enlightened languages, French and English (also the languages of colonization) or create a new one. This, according to the French Encyclopedist Condorcet, will lead men "to spiritual unity in the pursuit of a single goal" (cited in Todorov, 1989: 41). Because this process is based on human nature and its inherent capacity for reasoning, its pervasiveness becomes self-evident and inevitable. For Alexis de Tocqueville, "it is incomprehensible that equality should not ultimately penetrate the political world as it has elsewhere. That men should be eternally unequal among themselves in one single respect and

equal in others is inconceivable; they will therefore one day attain equality in all respects" (cited in Mouffe, 1984: 81). Some groups may be further away from the philosophers' ideal world, but eventually all will adopt the ways and languages of the exponents of civilization, France and Britain. It should be noted that this new equality is not meant for all individuals: women are considered as naturally inferior, and so are the speakers of other languages who are not yet endowed with the properties that only French and English can confer to them. Enlightenment was primarily meant for an elite, and, as pointed out by l'Abbé Grégoire at the time, while French was the language the whole of civilized Europe, it was not the language of most of the French population (Rigaux, 1991: 37). Thus, already in the eighteenth century, the notion of universal culture was paradoxically monocultural and assimilationist.

The transition to an industrial society in the nineteenth century led to two different interpretations of the principles of the Enlightenment: socialism and liberalism. The socialist alternative is based on what Todorov (1989: 228) calls *positive rights*, i.e.,on the principle of equality: all individuals are entitled to the same privileges, the same linguistic and cultural rights, and the same commodities. Liberalism, on the other hand, is based on *negative rights,* i.e, on the protection of individual rights and the free exercise of liberties: liberty of education, of religion, of thought, etc. This principle limits the intervention of the public sphere in the private sphere and protects both spiritual and material individual privileges. It is the task of the State constitutions to guarantee equality of opportunity, not equality of privileges, of salary, etc., since a

redistribution of commodities would lead to intervention in the privileges of the upper classes. In this way, democratic ideology becomes linked with the defense of private property. Liberty means liberty to have one's own property.

It is this kind of liberalism that provided modern capitalism with "a system of commodity production centered upon the relation between private ownership of capital and propertyless labour" (Giddens, 1990: 55). The protection of the small number of property-owners becomes essential to the good functioning of the economy; as President Bush said in his 1992 State of the Union Address: "If you hit the big guy, you hit the small guy." A redistribution of commodities and goods by the state instead of by capital owners, would, following this logic, be undemocratic. It is therefore essential for the State to protect the upper classes' material and symbolic capital by limiting access to ownership and some forms of education, including English.

In the First World, the making of consent is of paramount importance to the economic and political elite in its efforts to maintain its domination. The hegemony of the dominant classes is never established conclusively and, since an appeal to force is excluded in a system that claims to be democratic, a constant struggle must create the conditions necessary for the validation of capital ownership and accumulation. This implies a set of practices that are not merely economic, but also political and cultural. On the one hand, the media are used to shape consumer psychology, needs and behaviors. On the other hand, dominant individuals will attempt to undermine politics through the use of a depoliticized political discourse that aims at limiting participation and justifying decisions on the basis of "natural

law" (Bourdieu, 1991: 155). Along these lines, Brzezinsky, when he was director of the Trilateral Commission, proposed a plan to "increasingly separate the political systems from society and to begin to conceive of the two as separate entities" (cited in Mouffe, 1984: 97). By giving the responsibility of decisions to experts and to institutions such as the Supreme Court (e.g. abortion) and various commissions, so-called democratic administrations stand in the way of democratic participation so that political systems come close to eighteenth century despotism with its motto: "Everything for the people, nothing by the people." Furthermore, economic and social problems are attributed to groups who do not share the dominant language and culture and are accused of breaking the consensus. The success of the English Only movement and the development of anti-Asian feelings in the United States (Dugger, 1992: 1ff) are only some of the most visible results of these processes.

The French psychologist Béatrice Weyl shows how what people perceive as an interest for English and American culture is often only a phantasmal representation of stereotypes conveyed by the dominant culture: English as a universal language and as a language of prestige. Thus, it is prestige which the French try to gain through the learning of English, not culture or an instrument of communication. This may explain why many of them (including teachers of English!) are so hostile toward American culture in their reactions and their behaviors, especially when they are in the United States, but still claim to be interested in American culture and proudly wear American-style tee-shirts, tennis shoes, etc.

In the Third World, the liberties (i.e., the capital) of the English-speaking property-owners also need to be respected and any political system that threatens these liberties is accused of being anti-democratic. The difference with democracy in the United States and Britain is that the consent of the population no longer seems to be necessary so that, ironically, dictatorships appear to provide the best protection for individual and economic liberties, i.e., for democracy.

During the colonial period, local elites used English as a weapon against the colonizers (Kachru, 1986: 7). In the process, they justified both their position as the new leaders of the country and the use of English in their new political system and the economy. The more or less successful attempts to keep colonial borders soon made it clear that English alone had the potential of unifying the local elites. The fact that most of the people did not speak English did not seem to matter and, for a long time, no significant efforts were made to educate the population and foster participation. On the contrary, the colonial English-medium schools were maintained. When, in some countries, nationalist movements led to the elimination of these schools, elites sent their sons to other countries so that they could be educated in English (Kachru, 1986: 131). The paradox is only superficial: the need for popular support justifies the elite's position in favor of the national language, but, at the same time, education in English is perceived as necessary for the maintenance of a national and international elite.

The domination of English in many of these new democracies is purely ideological: nobody forces people to learn or use it. However, the economic advantage one can gain by knowing it gives it a "magnetic

pull" as a language of modernization. As noted by Kachru (1991: 8), "invisible strategies" can play a more important role than organized language policies; this is especially the case when these contradict the interests of the elite. For Bourdieu: "The language of authority never governs without collaboration of those it governs, without the help of the social mechanisms capable of producing this complicity, based on misrecognition, which is the basis of all authority" (1991: 113). Moreover, through their recognition of the power of English, the masses recognize the power of those who know English, i.e., the elite. They accept the authority of administrative and economic systems that function in English and, in doing so, paradoxically participate in their own domination.

Resistance to western domination in general and to American imperialism in particular has led to a revival of ethnonationalisms and to a rejection of English in favor of national languages. For the Czech historian Miroslav Hroch: "Where an old regime disintegrates, where old social relations have become unstable, amid the rise of general insecurity, belonging to a common language and culture may become the only certainty in society, the only value beyond ambiguity and doubt (cited in Hobstawn, 1991: 556). Unfortunately, the promotion of national languages, based on the notion of cultural identity, now appears equally damaging for democracy. New leaders, more interested in appropriating power in their own hands, often choose to ignore the multicultural and multilingual composition of their country or territory. In this respect, present-day nationalism appears to differ very little from the politics of decolonization. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon was already expressing a marked suspicion of

unchecked nationalism; he was arguing against the politics of separatism of the Mobutus, Idi Amins and Saddams as well as the pathologies of power that gave rise to tyrannical states while obstructing democratic freedom in the Third World (Said, 1992:180). When, in post-colonial democracies, laws were voted to protect linguistic minorities, they seemed to be more politically motivated than based on the the protection of individuals and their culture. In India, for example, The Commission for Linguistic Minorities decreed in 1965 that: "where there is a substantial minority constituting thirty percent of the population of a State, the State should be recognized as bilingual for administrative purposes" (cited in Mahapatra, 1989: 62). An opposition of more than thirty percent would make the states and the country ungovernable. This, I believe, is the true motivation behind these laws.

Education and the function of Intellectuals

Education has always been a cornerstone of nation-building in the modern state. The primary function of education in the eighteenth century was to instill patriotism in the population. For Rousseau: "When he opens his eyes, a child should see his nation, and, until his death, nothing else" (in Todorov, 1989: 208). The generalization of compulsory education in the twentieth century resulted in the insertion of the youth into one single cultural and ideological matrix (Rigaux, 1991: 37)

One cannot rule without an educated elite and, just as the English Empire needed to educate a local elite to exert their power, post-

colonial elites have tried to educate the lower classes to exert power over the country in the post-colonial era. In Cooper's words:

> When a language is needed for vertical integration, especially in the sense of facilitating social communication between the ruler and the ruled, the educational system becomes once again a favored medium for communication. When there is little vertical integration, and thus little opportunity for social mobility, the spread of English is impeded because those without opportunities for social mobility see little value in learning the language" (1982, 10).

However, making people believe that English will automatically open the door to upward mobility amounts to the creation of pure illusion. Knowing English may be a necessary condition, but it is by far not the only one for upward mobility; capital ownership, social class, race, and often gender are at least equally important. In his discussion of language in the Philippines, Tollefson (1991) shows how the English taught to lower-class students is both quantitatively and qualitatively insufficient for those who might want to apply for higher-level jobs. As has been shown by Bourdieu (1972) and Giroux (1989), educational systems are often institutionalized in such a way that they reproduce the power structure of society at large. The strict separation between English-medium schools and Universities and those using regional languages help maintain the separation between the elites and the masses. The ruthless repression of student movements challenging the system in French-medium universities in Sénégal in 1968 suggests that it is not, as the elite often argues, only for the purpose of administrative efficiency that this system is enforced, but also to prevent the middle and lower classes from having access to higher education (Calvet, 1974: 134).

For the "radical" theorists, Bowles and Gintis, only the elite has the possibility to choose in which society it wants to live, which kind of education it wants to have, etc. Others have to learn how to fit in society. The authors trace the difference between "choosers" and "learners" back to the first theorists of economic liberalism. In this respect, the following passage from John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* is well-worth quoting at length:

> The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community against his will is to prevent harm to others . . .. It is, perhaps, hardly necessary to say that . . . we are not speaking of children or young persons . . . [who] . . . must be protected against their own actions. . . For the same reason we may leave out of consideration those backward states of society in which the race itself may be considered in its nonage . . Despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians, provided the end be their improvement. (cited in Bowles and Gintis, 1989: 26)

Learners, in this perspective, are completely left out of the educational process since, by definition, they do not know what is good for them. They are denied the status of rational agent by virtue of their biological constitution or social position and their only function is to satisfy the needs of the state and the economy. The goal of education is to shape them to fulfill the specific function assigned to them by the "choosers," and to develop appropriate approaches, methods, and techniques functional for that purpose. Needless to say, learners will remain learners, and choosers, choosers. Upward mobility does not depend on education, but rather on pre-existing capital-ownership, social position, etc.

Intellectuals and educators play an important role in the reproduction of this system. Choosing to ignore their social, historical and intellectual roots and those of their field, they often prefer to consider themselves as a separate class, distinct from the capitalist and working classes (see e.g., Alvin Gouldner, 1979), and to escape their responsibility as bearers, producers, and dispensers of cultural capital. Noam Chomsky does not mince words when he accuses intellectuals of participating in state violence by "reinforcing the system of indoctrination, of which they themselves are victims -as is the norm for the educated classes, who are typically the most profoundly indoctrinated and in a deep sense the most ignorant group, the victims as well as the purveyors of the doctrines of the faith (1987: 126).

In the area of language study, sociolinguists have made great progress in integrating the study of language with its social context. However, their focus on purely synchronic and situational aspects of language use has led them to discard the broader social and historical aspects of linguistic exchanges. Speech act theory focuses on the illocutionary force of utterances in conditions of felicitous use, but what are these conditions? Are they universal, as claimed by Grice? Is an order obeyed because it is expressed with an imperative or because it is pronounced by someone who has authority to pronounce it? "In short," writes Bourdieu, "when a French talks to an Algerian, or a Black American to a WASP, it is not only two people who interact, but, through them, the whole colonial history and that of black economic, political, and cultural subjugation (of women, workers, etc) in the United States" (1992: 118). With this perspective in mind, we can more

easily understand the reluctance of some of our students to learn English since, in doing so, they perpetuate the conditions of their own domination.

By negating the political nature of pedagogy, educators promote the idea that education serves everyone in the same way. They thereby fail to recognize "the ways in which schools act as agents of social and cultural reproduction in a society marked by significant inequities in wealth, power, and privilege (Giroux, 1983: 170). Most graduate programs in SLA and language teaching prefer to limit their scope to technical and developmental issues and do not even touch upon the relation between language and power. Thus, political aspects of language teaching are usually not even considered in theoretical models and material development. Textbooks written in Britain and the United States are exported all over the world and share the same "apolitical" content and methodology, and this, in spite of the widespread reluctance of many EFL teachers to use materials and methods that are inappropriate to their own teaching (Pennycook, 1989: 589) The current emphasis on a narrow interpretation of communicative language teaching and on the process syllabus derived from American-based humanistic approaches developed in the sixties and seventies (e.g., Moskowitz, 1978) leads to the development of ethnocentric methodologies that are often incompatible with other cultures' teaching and learning styles; textbooks often feature an international community of business people and scientists that is inaccessible to most middle and lower class students in the countries where English is taught.

Learners may have the choice between different options within specific tasks, but they are rarely given the possibility to participate in the construction of their own syllabus, and even less in making education policy at the school or even at the state level. More often than not, teachers themselves prefer to protect their jobs and to exploit the "international market" rather than question their role in the hands of undemocratic, even dictatorial regimes.

Toward a democratic model for EIL.

The fragmentation of the Eastern Block together with the present difficulties of all western economies have provided scope for the resurrection of local nationalisms. Many people have given up hope in a political solution to national and world problems, as evidenced by the low participation in recent elections in many countries. For the authors of the most recent report of the Club of Rome, "the pressure of reality is so great that we have to change or disappear" (King and Schneider, 1991: 161). Therefore, "we need to find a structure of government that has the means to control change without resorting to violence" (p.107). The question for us is : what will that structure be, and how can English participate in creating a more democratic society?

Following our discussion in the first two sections of this paper, it follows that a model of EIL will only be democratic if (1) it relies on a political structure that integrates all cultures, (2) minorities are duly represented in this structure, (3) English is accessible to all, and (4) if language teaching and education in general promote autonomy and participation rather than reproduction.

Again, a return to the eighteenth century Philosophers may help us in our search for new sources of inspiration. For Montesquieu, cultural identity is a way to the Universal: "God," he writes, "is like this monarch who has different nations in his empire: they all bring him their tribute and all of them speak their own language (cited in Todorov, 1989: 200). It is normal, for Montesquieu, to prefer the member of one's own family to those of another's, the inhabitants of one's own town to those of another's, but this does not necessarily lead to conflict. Quite the contrary, cultural identity is a necessary first step toward nationalism and internationalism.

The problem of modern society is that it never took the idea of culture seriously. What is usually called ethnic or cultural identity often takes the form of nationalisms or regionalisms that typically ignore the multicultural and multilingual composition of most societies. Attempts to resolve conflict through federalism has only led to more factional conflict between and within territorial units, or to the fissiparous politics of Nigeria. This can easily be explained by the fact that these so-called political solutions have been inspired more by the thirst for power of an elite than by a true desire for democracy.

Recognizing cultural differences is one thing; using them to justify segregation and discriminatory treatment is quite another. As Kofi Yamgnane, the Togolese-born French Undersecretary of State for integration found out, racial and linguistic minorities are "far more interested in being included in French society than being different outside" (Kaplan, 1992: 46). Furthermore, says Kofi, "it is not only immigrants of color who have problems, but everyone who is excluded from French society." By promoting the idea of cultural and ethnic

differences, governments have often managed to justify the constitution of a structural underclass by attributing the problems resulting from it to race and culture. Quite cynically, they even succeeded in attracting the votes of the white unemployed who attribute their present status to "foreigners."

The present political upheavals at the national level may, in some ways, be salutary. Indeed, because of the obvious dysfunctions of their political system, many states have come to realize that it is only through the creation of supra-cultural institutions in which all nations and cultures are represented that independentist revindications can find an answer and lead to further integration. Only such a structure could ensure the protection of language minorities which states have been unable to guarantee so far. "It is not absurd," writes Giordan (1991: 80) "to imagine a European Council in which the president of an independent Catalonia would sit next to the Spanish president." Such a solution has also been proposed for Yugoslavia: each cultural/linguistic group would be represented in a national government. This, together with the fast internationalization of the economy and the erosion of national sovereignty may explain may explain why many states are willing to yield some of their power to international institutions such as the E.C and the U.N. The question is whether the elite will accept the participation to these institutions of the numerous minorities which have been oppressed in the national context. My position is that they they will have no other choice. Indeed, the construction of these larger entities makes no sense if they contribute to reproducing at the world level the structures responsible for poverty, conflict, and general

disaffection toward the political realm reflected in most national elections.

In these new institutions, English could develop the *transglossic* function (Truchot, 1990: 303) which it already has in many situations (e.g. in Scandinavian countries), i.e., it would be used in all contexts where a non-native speaker is present, and only in these contexts. Indeed, a generalized knowledge of English is necessary for such larger political units to work. For the French philosopher Alain Minc, "Europe will only exist when English will really be its (second) language and when all Europeans will speak two natural languages, theirs, and English (cited in Truchot, 1990: 349). The teaching of English should therefore be intensified at all academic and social levels, *but not as a medium of instruction.* Once it becomes a compulsory subject in all schools, English will cease to be a foreign language and function, sociolinguistically, as a second language in bi- and multilingual societies.

Generalized bilingualism should not lead to language "contamination" as is usually feared by language purists. In her "Anglicism Project" in Finland, Kari Sajavaara observed that "most Finns seem to take a rather negative attitude towards the use of English elements, and their use is therefore severely restricted to certain stylistic and pragmatic functions." Furthermore, she noticed that "the distorting effect may be greater in areas which are subculturally more homogeneous and which are experiencing the first impact of a foreign culture (cited in Truchot, 1990: 357). A survey conducted in France also showed that a good knowledge of both English and French leads to a better structural and functional separation of the

two languages. It follows that education in the first language is a necessary first step for the development of balanced bilingualism, both psychologically (or linguistically) and socially. This has important implications for the third world where huge efforts still need to be made to provide literacy in the first language. The development of literacy in English before the national language does not lead to acculturation to a more global context, but rather to deculturation and loss of identity that inevitably results in higher dropout in school, as has been shown in some third world countries (e.g., Niger). Therefore, even when knowledge is developed in English, it should be transmitted in the national languages so that it can be used in education at all levels.

The enforcement of such a policy would, needless to say, be very expensive. This, however, should be seen, not as a waste of money, but rather as a redistribution of capital in such a way as to use the enormous human capital that is present in the whole of society. Moreover, it might also help foster mutual understanding at all levels and prevent many of the present wars that are at least as expensive.

Pursuing such goals necessarily entails the democratization of language teaching and of education in general. As long as educators consider their role as one of "adapting the learner to his/her environment" (Freire, 1985: 116), and fail to consider students as rational beings capable of making their own decisions, they will participate (consciously or not) in the reproduction of an undemocratic system. Teaching for democracy implies, as Gramsci proposed, considering all men and women as intellectuals and allowing them to use their intellectual capacities (which in most present societies is

considered a subversive activity); thus, education needs to go beyond satisfying what students want to have by helping them become what they want to be; it should help them go beyond the question of "what can I do in the existing world" to answer the question "what do I want this world to be." Language, as both a marker of identity and an instrument of wider communication, is an ideal tool for the integration of the different levels of society, and the development of bilingualism should keep this integration in mind.

Of course, this implies a pedagogical perspective that involves risks, struggles, and some form of resistance toward those who want to impose their new world order on us. Whether we accept to take that risk is our choice, but, in any case, teaching for democracy and teaching for the status quo is not the same.

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